

September 9, 2004

### **West Nile Virus Strikes Gooding County Man; Second Case Under Investigation in Twin Falls County**

A Gooding County man has tested positive for West Nile virus (WNV) and a second case involving a Twin Falls County woman is under investigation. South Central District Health reports that the people involved with the cases, a man in his 50s and a woman in her 70s, both had a mild form of the virus that did not require hospitalization. Both people have recovered completely.

The two cases coincide with the recent identification of a man in his 50s from Elmore County who tested positive for West Nile virus; he also has recovered without hospitalization. In the past two weeks, West Nile virus has also been found in a horse in Twin Falls County and a bird in Gooding County.

Cheryle Becker, RN, Epidemiologist for South Central District Health, says that most people infected with West Nile virus have no symptoms or will only have a mild flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness, nausea and vomiting, eye pain, skin rash, and enlarged lymph nodes. But the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50.

There is no vaccine to protect humans against the virus. So far this year, there have been 1,191 human cases of West Nile virus in the United States and 30 deaths.

“With just a few weeks of summer left, the best thing people can do to protect themselves is wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants in the morning and evening when mosquitoes are most active, and use a mosquito repellent that contains DEET,” said Becker. “Also, horse owners should be sure to vaccinate their horses against West Nile.”

In addition, Becker advises people to insect proof their homes and reduce standing water on their property that might provide breeding habitat for mosquitoes. Birdbaths and decorative ponds should be emptied and cleaned every three to six days, she said.

The virus’ path is moving steadily across southern Idaho. Several birds and animals have been diagnosed with the disease during the summer and a few have died or been euthanized. District Health has been trapping mosquitoes in several areas of the district since June, including Gooding and Twin Falls counties, but no mosquitoes have tested positive for the virus.

Dead birds such as crows, ravens, magpies, and jays are being tested by South Central District Health for West Nile virus. Birds can be tested if they have been dead for less than 24 hours. The virus is spread by migrating infected birds, which are bitten by mosquitoes. The infected mosquitoes can then pass the virus on to people and other animals. Local District Health offices can answer questions about which birds are eligible for testing.

For more information about the West Nile virus, please visit the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s West Nile virus web site at <http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>. Additional information can also be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>